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# Body Politics Within the Body Politic: Ghanaian Disabled Communities and Their Relationships to Power

Conner Chivone Spinks  
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**Body Politics within the Body Politic:  
Ghanaian Disabled Communities and  
Their Relationships to  
Power**

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**University of Iowa**

**SIT Fall 2010: Origins of African Identity**

## **Acknowledgments**

I feel incredibly grateful for this experience, both the program itself and my stay in Ghana. First off, I'd like to thank my momma and sister Pri for listening to me prattle, complain, cry, and gloat about my experiences in Ghana when I called home. My group of loved ones at the University of Iowa held me down and supported me through the hell that was funding this trip.

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Thanks to Prof. Britwum for agreeing to be my advisor. SIT staff was wonderful and I know our program was as great as it was because of all the hard work Uncle Ebo, Mr. Ampah, Professor Dan, Auntie Nana, all the Benin staff, and Auntie Lydia put in. Thank you for taking care of us and caring about us.

## **Abstract**

I chose as my research topic disabled communities within Ghana and their relationships with different sources of power in Ghanaian society. To begin my analysis, I deconstructed the ‘disabled body’ and established disability as an axis of identity that has bearing on social positioning. I explored the power dynamics that dictate the lives of minorities, particularly the lives of those with non-normative bodies. Using my interviews of disabled Ghanaians and my observations of disabled Ghanaians in public spaces, I analyzed how systems are felt in everyday life.

## **Introduction**

I do not have a particularly interesting reason for my choosing disability as a topic for research. As a student of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies and Political Science, I am concerned with body politics and ways that the state polices non-normative bodies. Disability, in that respect, has been a topic of interest to me. My stay in Ghana has exposed me to a world where buildings that have a slope to assist individuals with mobility issues are not commonplace and an elevator is merely myth. It is the little things that highlight how very different the life I lead as an able-bodied person is to that of a person with a disability, particularly the life of a person from a developing country with a disability. I felt that difference as someone who is not adversely affected by the lack of accessibility; I can not claim to know how painful it would be to feel that difference as someone whose opportunity is limited because of their impairment. Even if my status as temporarily able-bodied is revoked and I am rendered disabled, I know that there are resources readily available to me that are rarely available in Ghana. I explored this topic to gain insight into a world I will never know.

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## Frameworks, Methodology, and Limitations

I am using a critical social research<sup>1</sup> framework that claims social organization as highly specific and maintained through oppressive systems. These systems privilege some lives over others; this results in power imbalances where the subordinate group is being oppressed directly by the privileging of the dominant group. I will be investigating the oppression of disabled persons with an intersectional<sup>2</sup> lens.

To best analyze the situation of disabled bodies in the society at large, I will deconstruct the disabled body and situate it on the hierarchy society currently has in place for normative and non-normative bodies. Analyzing this relationship through a post-structuralist lens, I will challenge foundationalist charges of autonomous social worlds/positioning and situate individuals into the “complex network of social relations.”<sup>3</sup>

I am refuting the traditional model<sup>4</sup> of disability and the medical model<sup>5</sup> of disability as they both render persons with disabilities as objects for either charitable organizations or medical institutions to care for and act for. This reduces their humanity and delegitimizes their fight for integration.

The definition of “person with disability” (PWD) I am using is the one found in the 2006

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Harvey, Contemporary Social Research Series: Critical Social Research (1991) 1.

<sup>2</sup> “Intersectionality” is a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw to emphasize the ways that systems of oppression and privilege ‘intersect.’

<sup>3</sup> Ki Namaste, “The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality” *Sociological Theory*, (July 1994) 221.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Coleridge, Disability, Liberation, and Development (1991) 71.

<sup>5</sup> Coleridge, 72.

## Disability Rights Bill:

‘Person with disability’ means an individual with a physical, mental, or sensory impairment including a visual, hearing, or speech functional disability which gives rise to physical, cultural, or social barriers that substantially limits one of the major life activities of that individual.

Using the social model<sup>6</sup> of disability, my investigation of disability will center on ways that society has not adapted to the impairments of individuals. I will not question ways that the impairments of individuals restrict them as their ability is not what I am contesting. I am contesting the power relations and the underlying politics of a marginalized group’s fight for legitimacy and social reconstruction.

I will be situating myself in the current socio-political moment as an individual who is from the Global North and able-bodied. My identities make me a direct beneficiary to the oppression of persons with disabilities in the Global South and I will attempt to be as reflexive about my position as oppressor in the kyriarchy<sup>7</sup> as possible. This means I will reflect on how the knowledge gained is applicable to me and my identities.

My research was conducted by interviewing individuals who were members of political organizations that were prominent in the disability rights movement. Further analysis was done on observations of persons with disabilities in public spaces, literature reviews, and governmental actions committed ostensibly for the betterment of disabled persons.

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<sup>6</sup> Coleridge, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Kyriarchy is a neologism created by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza to encompass the varied many systems of privilege and oppression that operate in the world. Kyrios (lord/master).



My interviews were typically forty-five minutes long, at most. I asked the same questions to every interviewee though I would ask follow up questions as they were relevant to gain further understanding. My questions were as follows:

1. Do you feel that being a person with disabilities puts you at a disadvantage compared to people without?

2. Do you feel there is a disabled community?

If yes, is this community separate from people without disabilities communities?

3. Are you aware of the Disability Rights Bill (2006)?

4. Do you feel that anything changed since its passing into law?

5. Do you feel the state reflects the interests of disabled people?

After meeting with individuals, I amended the first question to “disability” from “disabilities.” I didn’t ask if individuals were aware of the Disability Rights Bill when they clearly expressed knowledge of it in passing. I also added questions after the first couple interviews. They were as follows:

1. What would be the priorities of a state/government that did reflect the interests of the disabled community?

2. What do you feel should be the next steps for the state? For the disabled community?

The last question I later realized is problematic to essentialize disabled individuals as all

belonging to one community without having clearance from the disabled individual so I would occasionally word it differently.

The significance of my research lies in the unearthing of power via social relations that everyone is implicated in and has a role in perpetuating but the conditions of which may disempower some and heighten the status of others. The focus on disabled bodies and the lived experiences of disabled persons is to add to the sorely lacking scholarship on disability.

Admittedly, my research was limited by the actual time allotted for my project. I also am constrained in my findings because I was able to interview only one disabled woman within the activist community and I did not interview any deaf people. I will attempt to speak on the differences found within the dominant disabled communities as it concerns women and deaf members but I will be cognizant that I am limited in my findings.

## **Deconstructing the Disabled Body**

### **I. Models of Disability**

The body is an arena of struggle, especially for those who occupy bodies that are viewed as non-normative (and therefore, deviant) by those in dominant positions. Bodies that have impairments, that is, a difference found in the body that results in a disability when in the larger non-accommodating society, have for too long been viewed as infantile objects.

The traditional model of disability held that impairments are curses. Those with impairments had no legitimate demand for accommodations or social integration as their very being was against the creator. While speaking with Ike Tuggin of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled, he personally vouched for the continued existence of the stigma surrounding impairments in Ghana being caused by the traditional model of disability.<sup>8</sup> This stigma allows for the mistreatment of persons with impairments as the conditions of their oppression are viewed as abiding by natural law. The system is reified as though it is natural and the ways that it is created through human action are ignored. The ignorance of the larger system of oppression inhibits dissent and halts the movement of persons who are now disabled by their social environment. Even when the treatment is benevolent, it is viewed as charitable action that makes the person with a disability dependent on the benefactor and not allowing them to fully self-realize.

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<sup>8</sup> Ike Tuggin, notes in author's possession, 11/24/2010

The medical model, which was viewed as an improvement, is not much better. It viewed impairment as an “abnormality.”<sup>9</sup> The body and its capabilities are viewed as needing to fit into the inhospitable social environment. If there is a disconnect and the individual does not fit in society, then the person must change, not the environment. The causes of the impairment are based in medical knowledge but the treatment of the impairment merely aids the ableist ideology. The underlying structure has not changed from the traditional model because the physician is now the person responsible for the person with a disability. People with disabilities remain objects for other (more socially valuable) actors to act upon.

The social model critiques the social environment and barriers that are in place for people with impairments. It is very similar to the feminist argument about the social construction of gender. Like physical differences between men and women, there is a difference between those with impairments and those without. However, the difference gets a negative value in the able-bodied society which is similar to how femininity gets a negative value in the masculinist world. Because of the system in place, the people that the system directly benefits are unaware of how the world is being shaped by their dominance, for their continued dominance. This is the same for literally any exploitative and oppressive system, whether it is sexism or ableism.

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<sup>9</sup> Coleridge 72.

## II. Situating Disability

Systems of oppression don't operate in isolation. The ableist world we live in is at the same time an androcentric world. Within the organizations that I met with, most positions of power were filled by men with the exception of wings of organizations devoted to women. This is because systems of oppression are self-perpetuating. Unless there is a mission to place specific marginalized people in power, they will not be present because of the larger social constraints in place and the ideas about appropriate behavior for them.

Even within disabled organizations, not all disabilities are equally represented. In the case of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled, the inclusion of the intellectually disabled is as recent as two years ago.<sup>10</sup> It wasn't until the guardians of individuals came together to form an organization did the Federation encompass intellectual disabilities.

Another aspect of disability that is traditionally under explored is deaf or hearing impaired. D/deaf<sup>11</sup> individuals have historically been underrepresented in disability movements because there is a difference in communication. Physically, visually, and mentally impaired individuals are still able to use the dominant means of communication via speech. However, because D/deaf people's very impairment is based around an inability to communicate via the dominant means, they are isolated from larger discourses. Like any marginalized group, their shared experiences result in a Deaf culture. As George Veditz said, "First, last, and for all time, the people of the eye."<sup>12</sup> The survival of their alternative means of communication is dependent on being isolated in

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel Abadoo-Brew, notes in author's possession, (11/27/2010)

<sup>11</sup> Carol Padden, Tom L. Humpries, *Inside Deaf Culture* (1998) 3.

<sup>12</sup> Padden and Humpries, 4.

some respects. This clashes with the other disability groups' movements as they typically organize around social inclusion. The differences in how leaders of disability organizations create action plans show how deaf individuals become marginalized. Ike Tuggin of Ghana Federation of the Disabled and George Frempong of Ghana Blind Union spoke unequivocally on the importance of literally raising your voice. Public speaking is viewed as a venue to raise awareness about issues of disability. Mr. Firempong said he has been featured on radio shows and lectures, anything to get his "voice" out there. If he was a deaf individual instead of a blind individual, the opportunity to convey his messages using the dominant means of communication wouldn't be possible.

This is not to say that by being blind or physically disabled, Mr. Firempong and Mr. Tuggin are in some way better off than a deaf individual. But it should be noted how valued certain aspects of bodily performance are and who is capable of them.

Disability is itself a divisive term because it may have political connotations; it may be a personal identity; it can be a diagnosis; it may be an insult. The people I was able to contact for my research all technically identified as disabled because of their impairments but the ramifications for this personal identifier changed based on the individual's other identities.

Disability intersects with other identities. In the case of George Firempong, as a man who became blind late in life and had attended university as an undergraduate while sighted, he claims that his prolific titles and positions are not exceptionable. Though he is the Regional President of the Sports Wing for Ghana Blind Union; National Council

Member; Coordinator for Ghana Federation of the Disabled; Regional Officer, Special Needs Education Coordinator for Cape Coast; and Sub Chief of Siwidu, he says that he is not an exception because he believes that the success of a disabled person is tied to “their individual relationship to society.”<sup>13</sup>

This is in stark contrast to Ike Tuggin who claims that it is the social barriers to employment and full social life that individuals have to overcome, no mention of personal choice in the realizing of their lives. As an administrative head of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled, he is the leader of an organization that all disability political organizations fall under. His stance is more radical because his position is politicized. If he were not a critic of the government, his organization would not be able to progress.

To deconstruct disability properly, ability needs to be considered. It is not that disability is the only concept that affects bodies and how they are treated in society; for disability to operate as such, ability must be the normative concept to compare it to. Samuel Abadoo-Brew is the father of a child with intellectual disabilities. He is without any disabilities and operates in the world as able-bodied man. He too claims that there are significant social barriers for those with disabilities. As a family member of someone with a disability, his view of the barrier is that of close personal networks being the most important. He urges his son to attend school and is very critical of families that refuse to allow their relatives to lead full social lives. As an able-bodied person, it is difficult for him to imagine what larger social factors he may help to contribute to but his own contribution to his child’s future is secure.

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<sup>13</sup> George Firempong, notes in author’s possession, (11/24/2010)

When speaking with Christina Okoh Mensah, I was constrained terribly by time as she was busy and only able to speak to me via cell phone. As the only Ghanaian woman with disabilities I was able to interview, I concede that the information I was able to gain from her that is able to extrapolate to other women with disabilities is very limited. However, it is irrefutable that gender issues are central to issues of disabled bodies. Gender is what is expected and acceptable for individuals based on their perceived sex. Since the importance in gender is what is “perceived,” it is based on bodily performance. How the body is acting and how other bodies are acting in relation to it dictate what is expected and acceptable. When that body has an impairment, it is has rules attached to it that differentiate it from those without. Gender is done by men, women, everyone in between and outside. It is an institution as defined by Seumas Miller in Social Action: A Teleological Account, “[they are] structures of conventions and norms that regulate various species of generic joint activity.”<sup>14</sup>

Genders -and ideas about ability as they intersect- are made of ideas of conventionality and normalcy that work to regulate public spaces and the intercourses found within. However, the constraints placed on women in a masculinist society with strict traditional roles for women make operating as a disabled woman all the more difficult.

### **III. The Materiality of the Body**

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<sup>14</sup> Seumas Miller, *Social Action: A Teleological Account*, (UK: University Press Cambridge, 2001) 192.



Bodies are physical and have presence. The materiality of the body is the basis for defining normative and non-normative bodies. These definitions are constrained by the dichotomous problematic that forms the borders of acceptable social life. As Judith Butler stated in *Bodies That Matter*:

The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life where are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.<sup>15</sup>

The people who populate “uninhabitable zones” are without power as they are not rendered subjects. Devoid of power and status, they are acted upon by actors and their disempowerment means that they are bereft of recourse for the actions.

Behavior that would be acceptable for dominant groups such as applying for a position can be considered outrageous for some marginalized groups such as PWDs.<sup>16</sup> It is behavior typical to a subject, not an object. Subjects act in the world with agency; objects lie in wait for a subject to act upon them. Subjects dictate objects’ behavior by telling them what they can or can not do. There is a power dynamic present in the dominant group’s ability to direct the behavior of the subordinate group. Defining power as “the ability to affect the probability that others will perform some behavior,”<sup>17</sup> the dictation of acceptable behavior that comes from the hegemonic able-bodied masses to the bodies

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of Sex*, (Routledge, 1993) 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ike Tuggin, notes in author’s possession, 11/28/2010

<sup>17</sup> J.M. Whitmayer, Mann’s “Theory of Power-A (Sympathetic) Critique” *British Journal of Sociology*, (1997) 211.

with impairment minority is an exercise in domination.

We live in a capitalistic world that prizes production. The value placed on production is undergirded by an erasure of bodies with impairments. The social environment has been created and sustained by those in power. PWDs have not been in charge of the formation of their social environments from the beginning because the traditional model of disability forbade it. Within Ghana, Ato Anaman of the Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled claimed that formerly, “if you are disabled, you can not be a head of a family or a chief. You are a curse.”<sup>18</sup> The construction of an inhospitable environment results in an inability to produce on the same level as a person without disabilities and for whom the social environment was made to accommodate. This barrier results in further discrimination for not being able to compete on the unlevelled playing field.

Bodies perform. The performance of bodily action can be normative or deviant. Within society, bodies are defined by how they are allowed to act and how they actually act. Gender is one metric against which normative performance of the body is measured. Gender performances’ importance in the larger culture can not be stressed enough. Ghana’s traditional roles for different genders are colored by the larger ableist culture. Men who are unable to work and provide because of an impairment that either forbids them from laboring or getting hired are degraded in the larger culture because of their inability to perform as a man within the parameters of the society.<sup>19</sup> Their status is reduced to that of a child or worse as they are not viewed as being productive. Women who are not able to care for or bear children are not truly women. Their function as

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<sup>18</sup> Ato Anaman, notes in author’s possession, (11/28/2010)

<sup>19</sup> Ike Tuggin, notes in author’s possession, (11/24/2010)

women is dependent on their reproductive capabilities. Failing to function according to able-bodies rules, they are not accorded the status of woman. It is because of the discrepancy between what an able-bodied woman does and wants and what it is that women with impairments are able to do in the world constructed without their interests or abilities taking into consideration.

Since gender is an institution, it is composed of people. The people are behind the ideas that also compose an institution. The people are the most central component to an institution. It is sometimes theorized about how destructive or constrictive institutions survive and the emphasis is almost always on ideas, not the fact that people create those ideas.

The materiality of those in dominant positions is also important to discussion of materiality of disabled bodies. For the binary to presuppose one body as disabled, there must be an able *body* and people who believe in the supremacy of those bodies. Those people have bodies. It sounds simple, almost ridiculously so but these ideas come from *bodies*.

## **Body Politics in the Body Politic**

## **I. Public Bodies**

I admit that I have been between the medical and traditional models in my own thinking of disability. I have viewed disabled bodies as something to be pitied and to be fixed. When the idea was raised to me that cochlear implants are viewed as insulting to D/deaf<sup>20</sup> communities, I remember thinking, “Is it because of class differences so only poor people will be deaf?” Though I still think that is valid, this may be part of my own need to unlearn ableist ideology that believes ability (as we understand it) is not only the most valued by the dominant community but the most valued by the subordinate community as well.

I remember when I first realized the flaws in my conceptions of disability. There was a video on YouTube that showed an infant having his cochlear implant turned on and he heard for the first time.<sup>21</sup> It showed the baby looking around in wonder as his mother called his name. There was a moment where his eyes met his mother’s face and he smiled as if recognizing her. The comments were mostly filled with people claiming how they were nearly brought to tears by the look of wonder and recognition on the baby’s face. However, one commentator likened the video to an attack on Deaf culture. The comment immediately was attacked by other commentators as “selfish”. I am assuming this is on the grounds that for the child to remain hearing impaired would result in a disability within the larger hearing culture. It is hypocritical that the defense of the cochlear implant is that to withhold it is to be “selfish.” Selfish, as if there is something that they are

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<sup>20</sup> Deaf with a capital “D” denotes a cultural identity whereas lowercase “d” applies to any hearing impaired individual.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTzTt1VnHRM>

denying this child that would be cruel if it remained absent. The condition of deafness is intolerable. It is unacceptable. Imagine being a deaf person. Deafness is not just your condition. It is you; it is your body. It is unacceptable. You, your body is unacceptable.

When terms like “conditions” are used, it is an attempt to separate the real, tangible body from the notions of the body. Deaf people don’t have deaf bodies, they just have the condition. What renders the body a disabled body is that the condition is present *within* the body which influences how the body acts and is judged within the society. This frankness is what missing from the discourse. The current discourse attempts to compartmentalize the body and forget how physicality is used to judge individuals within society for both normative and deviant bodies. The body is what is used to categorize, judge, and place individuals on the hierarchies within society.

Within public spaces, PWDs have a curious position of being both conspicuous but also flagrantly ignored because of that conspicuousness. While traveling on a packed trotro in Accra, there was a man who was blind standing in the middle of the aisles. He was calling out in Twi to people and occasionally singing to himself about Christ. He began calling out something in Twi and saying “one cedi” repeatedly. I assume he was begging. Not a single passenger acknowledged him. When the man who collects the trotro fare was moving towards the back of the trotro and had to get pass the blind man, he waited directly behind him until he was more still and then moved by without even a passing glance. What made this moment even more interesting was when the blind man sat down, another man stood up. This man was sighted and began saying something in Twi. From the moment he stood, people immediately started shouting out to the sighted man. He was smiling and occasionally sang but to whatever he did, there was a response from the

trotro riders. The blind man was most obvious. He shouted, sang, stomped his feet, and gestured wildly. The sighted man simply stood and hummed to himself and there was a response from the very beginning. Within the trotro, the blind man was not rated as important enough for a response. It was similar to the treatment of the child in the seat behind me who was calling to her father for everything being sold by vendors on the street; ignore it as they don't know any better. Maybe he does this frequently. It's entirely possible that he rides that route and is well known to the man collecting fares that ignored him completely. However, the complete absence of even token admissions of acknowledgment highlights how invisible disabled persons are in public spaces. It must be noted how there was no overt sanction against the man for being present and visible in a public space. No one forced him to sit down and be quiet. However, "power is thought to work through indirect techniques of self-regulation which make it difficult for individuals to behave in any other way."<sup>22</sup> Power was quietly exerted when the disabled man tried to control the public space. Power was also exerted enormously when the passengers of the trotro refused his every attempt at engaging with them. Nothing active was done to refuse him but their silence was an 'indirect technique' that caused him to quiet himself and sit. Allen's (2004) explanation of power further explains the power dynamics:

If people . . . accept the 'truth' of the arrangements in which they find themselves, then those same selfsame arrangements provide a guide as to what kind of behavior is thought to be acceptable and what is not...Conduct is thought to shaped as much by what

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<sup>22</sup> Reference to Michael Foucault's theory on power, John Allen, "The Whereabouts of Power: Politics, Government and Space" *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* (2004) 23.

they absorb and imagine the ‘truth’ of their circumstances to as it is by the physical layout, distribution, and organization of their surroundings.<sup>23</sup>

Behavior and conduct being curtailed by the individual is not without outside influence but there is not typically an obvious threat against individuals for stepping out the boundaries. Instead, it is commonly agreed what is ‘acceptable and what is not.’ This is enough of an agreement to deter most deviations. This analysis of power lays out how it is that marginalized peoples still have agency even when their behavior is curtailed.

The streets of Cape Coast are almost entirely without sidewalks. If there are sidewalks, they are interrupted by a gutter or other obstacle. I have noticed blind individuals walking with an aide, usually a small child, who leads them by the hand across the streets and help them to maneuver the sidewalks. Once, I watched a man cross the street and walk a distance with the assistance of a small child though he was holding a cane.<sup>24</sup> The continued dependency on someone else even with a tool to accommodate unpredictable terrain shows the inadequacy of the accommodations given. The cane is not enough for him to travel alone. He must remain dependent on the child. The position of dependent is typically occupied by a child. In this instance, there is someone depending on the dependent. There is a lowering of status when the dependent is in a position of authority over an individual even if that authority is as simple as knowing the directions to get safely home.

Accra is an interesting study in extremes. As I rode to meet with individuals to the

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<sup>23</sup> Allen (2004) 23.

<sup>24</sup> Fieldwork notes in author’s possession

compound that houses all the disability organizations, I watched individuals with legs that atrophied from disuse sitting on skateboards, weaving in and out of traffic, begging for money. I noticed how coated in sweat they were and realized how hot it must be surrounded by exhaust on a blacktop street in the tropics. They were propelling themselves quickly to avoid getting hit by the cars that were not slowing or moving to avoid them. I know this is a scene that could have been replicated in literally any country as the disabled grossly overpopulate the unemployed and destitute in most countries<sup>25</sup> but when I realized how at least my home country has a welfare system that helps to reduce the number of disabled folk on the streets, there is no such thing in Ghana. There are fields of cash crops that aid the economies of superpowers in Ghana but there isn't enough money to enforce a law that would reduce the suffering of its people. I realized how incredibly privileged I am to be riding (in a taxi no less!) to organizations created to alleviate the suffering of people who have to rush to avoid getting hit by my taxi on my way to ask questions about the people who had to rush out of my way. It was an overwhelming feeling that made me self-conscious about myself as I acted in Ghana's public sphere all that day.

## **II. Body, the arena**

From the beginning of the Ghanaian state, there was an interest in the protection and

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<sup>25</sup> Ike Tuggin, notes in author's possession, (11/24/2010)



rights of PWDs. Kwame Nkrumah, the first elected leader of Ghana, reportedly wanted to include provisions for the protection of PWDs in the constitution but it was ill received.<sup>26</sup>

The development of formal political organizations that were galvanized around issues of disability first came about with the inception of the National Association of the Deaf in 1968.<sup>27</sup> I wasn't able to find an exact year for the foundation of Ghana Association of the Blind (which eventually developed into the Ghana Blind Union) but the other major organizations were founded in the 1980's. In 1980 and 1987 Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled and the Ghana Federation of the Disabled formed, respectfully.

The development of the Disability Rights Bill originated when constructing the 1992 constitution and again there were debates about including provisions for disabled populations that failed to make it into the constitution.<sup>28</sup> The eventual passage of the bill into law wasn't until 2006 with a ten year moratorium so implementation of the bill would come earliest in 2016. The ten years is to allow for changes in infrastructure to accommodate impairments though no one I spoke with felt that anything was happening in this ten year period that would ease the implementation of the bill. Even the most conciliatory attitudes felt that there was not enough being done. The common refrain is that it's visible new buildings are being constructed but there isn't a move to more accessibility. The ten year moratorium is understandable for new building construction. However, some clauses could be immediately implemented such as the clause that no disabled person may be insulted and offenders will be fined. The problem with incorporating clauses such as that is that Ghana suffers from a lack of an appropriate

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<sup>26</sup> George Firempong, interview notes in author's possession (11/24/2010)

<sup>27</sup> Ike Tuggin, interview notes in author's possession (11/24/2010)

<sup>28</sup> Ike Tuggin, interview notes in author's possession (11/24/2010)

policing body.<sup>29</sup> There was an attempt in the bill to create the National Council on Persons with Disability to oversee the implementation of the bill but according to Ike Tuggin, it is not staffed and there are no monies going to it.

To implement the bill, they will need “money, time, adequacy and competency of staff, and power.”<sup>30</sup> Considering the difficulty in implementing policy in a country such as the USA that has the infrastructure and policing bodies, for a nation with little in the way of infrastructure and money for causes such as these policy enacted to protect a struggling minority is an immense task. The most common complaint I heard when discussing the bill with individuals within organizations was that the implementation of the law was going to be a problem.

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) divided the structure of the policy implementation process into three equal environments: Environment I “Policy Formation,” Environment II “Policy Implementation,” and Environment III “Policy Evaluation.”<sup>31</sup>

Within the first environment, the actors were formal decision makers and activists instigating action for their causes, such as the Ghana Federation of the Disabled. Ike Tuggin minces no words about the pressure his organization placed on the state to pass this piece of legislation. “We were in the streets of Accra! The state was forced to listen to us!”<sup>32</sup>

The second environment begins with the “legitimizing of by the formal government

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<sup>29</sup> Allison Walker, notes in author’s possession, (11/24/2010)

<sup>30</sup> Robert T. Nakamura and Frank Smallwood, *The Politics of Policy Implementation* (St. Martin’s Press, 1980) 55-56.

<sup>31</sup> Nakamura and Smallwood, (1980) 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> Ike Tuggin, notes in author’s possession (11/24/2010)

policy makers.” The implementation process is the absolutely most contentious aspect of the spheres. According to the different interview subjects, the bureaucracy is unwilling to act within the mandates given to them by the policy makers. George Firempong defends the advances of the state and claims that any evidence of stagnation in the political climate as it relates to disability is because of “discriminatory attitudes of certain officials.”

Since 2002, every quarter, 2% of funds from the District Common Fund were earmarked for disabled communities throughout Ghana.<sup>33</sup> However, funds have either been late, been disbursed as loans, or not come at all. The system allows for bureaucratic officials to refuse disbursing it with little sanction. Recently, there has been talk of releasing the money in to a bank account accessible only to those who it is designated for.

Money is a crucial resource in the fight for disabled individuals being fully integrated in to social life. When asked what should be the top priorities of a government committed to disabled causes, everyone responded with education and employment. Education would provide the skills necessary for future employment. Employment would guarantee autonomy to a person when they are able to care for themselves. Both of these as goals for the disabled communities show the dearth of education and employment opportunities. According to George Firempong (and corroborated by Allison Walker and Ato Anaman), the percentage of disabled children in school is 6%. Mr. Firempong continues, “There should be 1 disabled child in school for every 30 non-disabled but that isn’t happening.”<sup>34</sup> The disparity in educational attainment for disabled children directly

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<sup>33</sup> Ike Tuggin, notes in author’s possession (11/24/2010)

<sup>34</sup> George Firempong, notes in author’s possession (11/24/2010)

leads to under/unemployment in adults, leaving them dependent on their families if they are so lucky.

Even within the classroom, there is no assurance that disabled children will be accommodated. George Firempong spoke to me about how blind children won't receive Braille materials or deaf children seated away from the front where it would be easier for them to read lips. Even something as basic as a school having no accessible restrooms may make it so that it is difficult for a child to have sustained attendance at school. When basic needs aren't met, children and their caretakers are not going to fight for them. Sometimes, it's easier to keep the child home and thus the cycle of dependency continues for a new generation.

## **Conclusion**

Bodies act politics.<sup>35</sup> Bodies occupy spaces in our society and those spaces are given according to institutions and systems that were put in place by the larger social community. Ideology undergirds institutions, and thus undergird exploitation, are the products of a body. Ideas originate in people and institutions are human communities. Disability is an identity that bestows a status on to the individual. It allows and forbids certain behaviors as acceptable. These ideas of acceptability are agreed upon by the larger social community. Disability is not to be taken as a monolith. Within the larger label of ‘disabled’ there are communities that sometimes agree on goals and causes while other times there is difference that makes even the label ‘disabled community’ disingenuous. Within the Ghanaian context, some advances have been made to aid in the lives of disabled individuals; however, implementation is difficult for a nation with little in the ways of infrastructure.

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas C. Shevory, *Body/Politics: Studies in Reproduction, Production, and (Re)Construction*, (CT: Praeger 2000) 169.

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## **Interviews**

Ato Anaman, personal interview, (11/28/2010)

George Firemong, personal interview (11/24/2010)

Ike Tuggin, personal interview, (11/24/2010)

Allison Walker, personal interview, (11/24/2010)